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## The 2015 State of Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha

Ben Walker

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Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha (DSR-TKA) has a long and proud history. DSR was founded in 1906 as a national honorary, while TKA was founded two years later in 1908. Much later along, in 1963, the two merged. In the 1960's the organization mostly supported debate, but as forensic activities evolved across the country so did DSR-TKA; public speaking events were adopted, followed by oral interpretation competition. The organization flourished for many years as one of the main voices in forensic leadership.

Many years have passed since DSR-TKA merged and the organization has eroded from memory for many. I can recall spending my entire undergraduate and graduate years active in forensics, but never hearing the name of this historical organization until my second year in graduate school. But DSR-TKA has been instrumental in shaping the forensic experience for so many students and coaches; it is weaved into the fabric of forensic history that has guided our way for so long.

In his 2013 article in *Speaker and Gavel*, Larry Schnoor remembered being at the 1968 DSR-TKA national tournament when Dr. Martin Luther King was shot. The riots in Washington and the experience he had with this team helped shape his career. Schnoor also fondly recalled the 1966 DSR-TKA national tournament where 52 schools attended, but noted that sometimes nationals had over 75 teams participating. Those numbers no longer bless the organization, with team memberships dwindling to single digits in recent years. Schnoor estimates the rise of other national forensic organizations has a direct link to the decline of DSR-TKA. Finally, after many years of declining membership, the DSR-TKA decided in 2014 to no longer host a national tournament.

DSR-TKA can still play a significant role in today's world of collegiate forensics and as we move into the future. DSR-TKA is carving out a new space to better serve the students and coaches of this activity. When I first joined the organization to serve as the Vice President in 2011, I was asked to bring a fresh perspective. When I moved into the role of President in 2013, I made it a priority to reshape and revitalize this once thriving organization.

The National Council was reformed and together we began the process of bringing DSR-TKA back into relevance. We took a look at the national landscape and found that the vast majority of forensic organizations center on a tournament model. Since the national tournament circuit is already crowded with many quality options for teams to choose from, DSR-TKA has opted to move away from that.

But what does such an organization look like? How does it serve the community? These are the questions in which the National Council continues to debate. DSR-TKA has embraced change and has moved away from the honorary model as well, switching to a simple fee-based membership. *We will continue to seek to provide educational opportunities and recognition of excellence in collegiate speech and debate.* In addition to publishing *Speaker and Gavel*, our bi-annual journal regarding communication studies, and offering support to the entire collegiate forensic community, we provide members with a variety of benefits, including:

**The Online Forensics Festival:** With the skyrocketing costs of competition and the need for business professionals to be able to present themselves effectively to via modern telecommunication systems, DSR-TKA has led the way with a digital tournament that offers students a way to gain valuable feedback without the grind of travel.

**Special awards:** We understand that recognition for hard work is greatly appreciated on a personal and professional level. DSR-TKA offers awards for student Forensic Scholars, the Top Forensic Publication, Coach of the Year, and the Spirit of Forensics Team award. Along with the recognition from the Online Forensics Festival, these awards attempt to balance celebrating excellence in our students and our coaches.

**Grants:** We also now have specially funded grants that help fund projects for forensic teams that may be strapped for cash. DSR-TKA wishes to foster forensic excellence in all forms and sometimes that takes a little financial assistance. Members can apply for funds to help them travel or cover other costs. Each grant will be named after important members from the history of DSR-TKA.

While there have been many changes to DSR-TKA, our commitment to forensic scholarship has never been stronger. *Speaker & Gavel* remains one of the main areas where we believe we can serve the forensic community. This journal represents the voice of so many of our peers and encouraging quality scholarship is an ideal way for those messages be heard.

As we move into the future, DSR-TKA will be leader in the forensic community. Where there is a need for recognition and support of forensic excellence, we will seek to meet it. We will encourage forensic pedagogy and provide resources to those who need them. While we may not look the same as in the past, and we may function differently than many organizations, DSR-TKA is ready to serve you. Please join us as we make the future of forensics brighter for all of us.

Ben Walker  
President  
Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha